

Individual differences and coping styles influence the impact of chemotherapy-induced alopecia (CIA)

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Background

Chemotherapy-induced alopecia (CIA):

- Temporary, cosmetic side effect of cancer treatment
- High impact on body image & quality of life (QoL)
- Few studies focused on coping strategies for CIA but these two aspects have not been studied in relation to each other

Methods

- Focus group & interviews conducted in the Netherlands (n=19 patients) & Australia (n=17 patients)
- Patients reported about the impact of CIA on their QoL & about coping strategies
- Interview transcripts from both countries were thematically analysed & data combined

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Results

- Impact of CIA on QoL varied widely, from "Not having been any problem at all" to "I was constantly aware of it for many months"
- Roughly coping styles are divided into (partial or total) sharing or camouflaging CIA, from feeling ashamed & hiding, to trivialising CIA & being confident
- Coping style adopted at the beginning of chemotherapy was decisive for the whole treatment period
- Over time some acceptance of hair loss developed, but negative impacts on QOL persisted throughout treatment
- Patients who accepted CIA without question mainly had problems with the unexpected, often unwelcome compassion they received from total strangers

Discussion/ Conclusion

- Type of coping style determined the short & long term impact of CIA
 - During all daily activities
 - During contact with patients' close relatives, colleagues or total strangers
- Patients were generally satisfied with the information about CIA from oncological care givers
- Patients would have liked to receive more practical information from fellow patients, e.g. about how to cope with alopecia & re-growth of hair & information to give to hairdressers

